Volunteerism in Saudi Arabia
Profiles, Motivations and Perceptions of Volunteer Club Members

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to assess the profile of volunteerism in Saudi Arabia, particularly the Al-Jubail Volunteer Club and its impact to community. One-hundred ninety (190) members of the club are the respondents of the study. Descriptive research design was utilized to gain accurate profile of situation. It is found out that the demographic profile of volunteers coincides with some previous studies in terms of age bracket and occupation. Community concern motivated volunteers to participate. Volunteers perceived volunteering as a worthwhile activity. It is something that can improve and imply positive impact on their personal development. It is further concluded, volunteering can help in over-all development of its members and community as well.

KEYWORDS
Community Service, Motivational Perception, Social Responsibility, Volunteering Work, Volunteerism

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Volunteering is generally considered as altruistic activity where an individual or group provides services for no financial or social gain to benefit another person, group, or organization. Volunteering calls for skill development and is often intended to promote goodness or improving one’s quality of life. Many volunteers are specially trained in the areas they work in, such as medicine, education, or emergency rescue. Others serve on an as-needed basis, such as in response to a natural disaster (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Rich in culture and history, the Middle East is an intriguing volunteer destination with options in multiple countries. Although it is often associated with complex regional conflict, the Middle East is also known for its hospitable people and amazing ancient remnants sure to impress any history buff. Whether helping at a Jordanian school or working with the elderly in Israel, volunteers will get the chance to interact with local Middle Eastern communities and discover a unique culture (Volunteer Programs in the Middle East, n.d.).

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Studies have shown that the number of volunteers all around the world is on a constant rise, making it a more culturally “popular” activity. This is apparent in Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030, where one of its “An Ambitious Nation” goals is to increase the number of volunteers from 11,000 currently, to an outstanding 1 million yearly. According to the World Bank, the number of volunteers currently represents a staggeringly low 0.034 percent of the Saudi population. While the practice of volunteering has a positive effect on the mental health and unity of the community, it also affects the political and civil engagement of youth in matters ranging from projects, decisions and government-citizen communication. It has the power to transform and rejuvenate the reputation of the Middle East from a politically “troubled” region, to a set of nations possessing innovation and strength. This is why volunteering should be considered as a sociopolitical vision. What people do not realize is that by volunteering, they are directly supporting at least one cause, or in many cases, numerous causes. Saudi Arabia is in fact a leading example of providing humanitarian aid and volunteering its financial resources to help other countries. As of 2014, the Kingdom was the country with the largest donations as a proportion of national income, with SR54 billion representing 1.9 percent of the Kingdom’s Gross National Income (GNI). The UN praised its generosity, as the King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Aid has become an international charity, achieving regional stability and spreading political peace and safety. In short, volunteering is an act of compassion, but also a powerful social and political catalyst for positive change. It allows for the integration of critical thinking, political awareness and youth engagement in every community it touches (Saudi Gazetete, 2017).

To shed more light on the aspect of volunteerism, as well as discover its impact either positive or negative, existing studies were reviewed.

According to Henderson (2018) in her study about motivation and perceptions of volunteerism, adults are most motivated to volunteer by affiliation needs or the need for interaction with others. These volunteers, the adult, also described their volunteering as being leisure activity.

Combining a life course perspective with recent theorizing on motivationally related agendas for social behavior, Otomo et. al. (2000) investigated the purposes, expectations, and outcomes of adult hospice volunteers of varying ages. They found out that younger volunteers tend to be motivated by and to achieve outcomes related to interpersonal relationships, whereas older volunteers tend to be motivated to a greater extent by service or community obligation concerns. Furthermore, in hierarchical regression analyses predicting overall satisfaction, benefits relative to cost, commitment, and changes in self-esteem over 6 months of volunteer service, relationship-related variables demonstrated greater and significant predictive power for younger relative to older volunteers. Service-oriented variables, hypothesized to be more influential in predicting the outcomes of older volunteers, tended to be inconsistently related to these same outcomes.

According to the study of Johnson, et. al. (2010), in their sample of respondents of both volunteers and non-volunteers indicates that those adolescents who become involved in volunteer activities have higher educational plans and aspirations, higher grade point average, higher academic self-esteem, and higher intrinsic motivation toward school work. But irrespective of these bases of selection, there is evidence that volunteering affects important work-related and social outcomes. Volunteering is found to strengthen intrinsic work values and the anticipated importance of community involvement and to decrease the anticipated importance of career.

Hassay and Peloza (2006) found out in their study about Intra-organizational volunteerism that that companies, charities, and employees can capture incremental benefits from intra-organizational volunteerism. Their findings also present managers and charities with insights that will allow them to increase employee participation in such programs and help to fulfill the insight of Ralph Waldo Emerson: “It is one of the beautiful compensations of this life that no one can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.”

Fisher and Ackerman (1999) studied the effects of mandatory volunteerism on intentions to volunteer. They found out that students who initially felt it unlikely that they would freely volunteer had significantly lower intentions required to serve than after being given choice. Those who initially
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